

# MILES CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Montana Senate Judiciary Committee  
61st Legislature  
Helena, Montana

Dear Honorable Senate Judiciary Committee Members,

I am writing this letter in support of Senate Bill 223. I base my support of Senate Bill 223 on my experiences and contacts with members of the homosexual community.

I would like to start first with a brief word about me. I have been a police officer and a certified peace officer in the State of Montana since 1996. A majority of that time I have been assigned to investigate various Federal, State, and local crimes. I also hold a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Criminal Justice.

In August 2007 I investigated an incident of Aggravated Assault which occurred in Miles City, Montana. The victim of this crime was a man from Colorado named Ran Cochran, whom I believe has since testified before this committee. Mr. Cochran is an openly homosexual male and based on my investigation I believe that this was a major factor in his being assaulted. Unfortunately I can not disclose any details of this investigation as it is currently in the prosecution stage and has not been finally resolved as of this date.

I do believe that had Senate Bill 223 been in place at the time of this incident it may have helped by offering further options in resolving this incident. It would have also allowed the victim and his family to be able to address the offender in a manner that may have helped them resolve any personal issues they faced while dealing with the repercussions of the crime.

I would also like to say that I have had a lot of contact with the homosexual community in Denver, Colorado. I have a life long friend who is homosexual and now lives in the Denver area. During trips to the Denver area in recent years I had the occasion to spend time with him and several of his close friends. As a heterosexual or "Straight" male I received a gracious welcome by the homosexual community while I was visiting my friend. I at no time did I feel uncomfortable in this community and did not feel intimidated because I was a straight man in a gay community. I was shown no prejudice by persons within the community because I was different than them.

This said a lot to me as I do not believe that they receive the same treatment in our societies or would have felt the same way as I did in a similar situation. This is why I strongly support the efforts of this legislation as I feel it helps level the playing field a bit. As a peace officer I took an oath to protect the city and its occupants. This includes visitors that may pop in from time to time. I have to admit that it causes me great sorrow that I was not able to prevent the assault on Mr. Cochran and that the memory of his Miles City visit will be what it is.

• In Closing I do not believe that this bill will be the "catch all" solution to the crimes perpetrated against homosexuals, or any other protected entities. Nor do I believe that it will completely prevent these crimes from happening. I do feel however that it is a step in the right direction and ask that you to pass it into law.

If the opportunity had been available to me I would have liked to address this committee in person. As it was not possible I submit this letter in lieu of.

Respectfully submitted,

Josh A. Stratton  
Detective Lieutenant  
Miles City Police Department

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